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ABSTRACT

A factor analytic study which sought to discover the dimensions of credibility in the context of subordinate and supervisor interaction is reported in this paper. It was hypothesized that perceived supervisor credibility is a function of subordinate part participation in decision making, communication reciprocity, feedback perceptiveness, feedback responsiveness, and feedback permissiveness. The subjects for this study were 145 subordinates in an organizational setting. Confirmation of the hypothesis, however, raised the following question: if subordinates perceived their supervisors as credible sources, what communication behaviors relate significantly to what credibility dimensions? The dimensions of supervisor credibility are then described in relation to the behaviors. Suggestions are also made for future research. (RB)

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BEHAVIORAL COMPONENTS OF PERCEIVED SUPERVISOR CREDIBILITY

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In recent years, behavioral scientists have given considerable attention to human behavior in organizations. However, the usefulness of these research findings, particularly in organizational communication, has been limited [18:9]. One of the communication variables which has not been explored adequately in the organizational context is source credibility. According to McCroskey, "an extensive body of literature has developed over the past two decades indicating that source credibility may be the single most important variable in determining persuasive effects of communication" [14:1]. Although source credibility has been directly or indirectly noted as an important variable in the study of organization communication [21, 20, 5], there is a general lack of precise understanding with reference to how the credibility construct operates within the organizational setting. For example what dimensions of judgment do subordinates utilize when perceiving their superiors? What communication behaviors of supervisors explain the variability in the way they are perceived by subordinates regarding each dimension of source credibility? The present study explored both questions.

By a better understanding of the importance of source credibility management might be better able to place key individuals in positions where they could be more effective and enhance organizational effectiveness generally. Jacobson and Seashore [11], for example, found certain "Liaison" individuals who significantly invluenced the communication among various organizational groups. These "Liaison" individuals served as influentials who transmitted a great deal of information throughout the organizational net. Walton [24] hypothesized that key personnel (Centrals) act as "magnets" by drawing information on to others (Peripherals). One of the significant findings of

Walton's research was that "Centrals" generally possess some or all of the following characteristics: (a) authority, (b) power, (c) expertise. A remaining factor, "Sociability," was also identified by Walton, but not to any significant degree. In their study of a research and development laboratory at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, Allen and Cohen [1] used the term "Gatekeeper" to describe essentially the same role as Walton's "Central" and Jacobson and Seashore's "Liaison."

In all of the above studies, the variable of "credibility" as it was identified in the research, seemed to be a major factor in interpersonal effectiveness. In his review of the literature, Tompkins [21] suggests that "expertise" is the most important variable in determining the degree of trust or influence of certain individuals in the organization. In two recent investigations, perceived supervisor credibility was found to correlate significantly with subordinate satsifaction with immediate supervision [6, 7].

In the attempt to determine what dimension of judgment subordinates utilize when perceiving their supervisors, we should not assume that credibility dimensions discovered by researchers in a particular communication context apply when we move to a different context i.e., the organizational setting. That is, although previous research by Hovland 10 , McCroskey [13], and Berlo [4], discovered similar factor structures for credibility, these results do not provide justification for assuming that the same factors operate when subordinates perceive their supervisors. Tucker [22, 23], Applebaum and Anatol [3] and McCroskey [14] suggest that factors found in previous studies may not provide an underlying structure which will remain stable across contexts. It appears necessary then for researchers to do their own factor analyses of the dimensions of credibility before attempting to measure other variables which may relate to it. A factor analytic study is reported in

the present paper which sought to discover the dimensions of credibility in the context of subordinate and supervisor interaction.

If one can determine the factors representing perceived credibility to subjects in an organizational setting, a next step would be to determine the specific communication behaviors which relate to each dimension of perceived credibility. That is, once the factor structure is understood regarding the way subordinates perceive their supervisors, a more complete understanding of the credibility construct in the organizational setting should be achieved. Also, if we discover the communication behaviors of supervisors which explain the way they are perceived on each of the operating credibility dimensions, we will have contributed to an understanding of organizational communication.

Redding [19] suggests four types of communication behaviors which might constitute the "communication climate" of an organizational unit:

1. The degree of reciprocity in superior-subordinate communications--What kind of reciprocal relationships exist between superiors and subordinates? How "honest" and "open" are these relationships?
2. The degree of "feedback perceptiveness"--To what degree are supervisors sensitive or aware of feedback being directed to them?
3. The degree of "feedback responsiveness"--To what degree does a supervisor give feedback to subordinates' requests or grievances?
4. The degree of "feedback permissiveness"--To what degree does a supervisor permit and encourage feedback responses from subordinates?

The types of behavior identified by Redding seem especially relevant to the matter of explaining perceived credibility in the organizational setting. This framework was utilized in the present study as a basis for formulating the communication behaviors of supervisors which may relate to the perceived credibility of supervisors.

An added dimension which must be included in an analysis of the "communication climate" is the degree of subordinate participation in decision-making. The findings of much of the research in organizational behavior for the past two decades have resulted in the general hypothesis that increased subordinate participation in decision-making will increase subordinate satisfaction and motivation [15, 9, 2, 12].

It is suggested in this study, that perceived supervisor credibility may be a function of certain communication behaviors which comprise the "communication climate" of an organizational unit. In other words, perceived supervisor credibility may be a function of subordinate participation in decision-making, communication reciprocity, feedback perceptiveness, feedback responsiveness, and feedback permissiveness.

Method

Two instruments were used in this study. The instrument to determine perceived supervisor credibility was borrowed from the factor analytic research of Berlo, Lemert and Mertz [4]. In order to validate this instrument for the organizational environment, their hypothesized semantic-differential-type scales were submitted to 145 subordinate subjects in an organizational setting. The subjects were asked to respond to these scales with reference to their <u>own</u> <u>immediate</u> supervisor.

The data were then submitted to a principal-axis factor analysis with varimax rotation. An eigenvalue of 1.0 was established as the criterion

for termination of factor extraction. For an item to be considered loaded on a resulting factor, a loading of .50 or higher was required with no loading of .40 or higher on any other factor. At least two scales must be loaded on a factor for it to be meaningful, and each factor should contribute five percent or greater to the total variance.

The scales which didn't load according to the hypothesized factors were "safe-dangerous," "patient-impatient," "trained-untrained," "able-inept," "frank-reserved," "authoritative-unauthoritative," "calm-upset," All but those scales loaded sufficiently on the hypothesized factors. The three evaluative factors accounted for 62.2% of the total variance. "Safety" accounted for 5.8%, "qualification" for 14.1% and "dynamism" for 42.3%.

Based on the factor analysis of the Berlo instrument, (see Table 1), the following scales were chosen to measure subordinate perceptions of supervisor credibility:

Safety: just-unjust; objective-subjective; unselfish-selfish; fair-unfair; ethical-unethical.

Qualification: experienced-inexperienced; skilled-unskilled; informed-uninformed; intelligent-unintelligent; qualified-unqualified.

Dynamism: bold-timid; active-passive; agressive-meek; emphatic-hesitant; forceful-forceless.

The instrument used to measure subordinate participation in decision-making and "communication climate" was developed by the author [5] based on previous research by Zima [25] and Minter [16]. It consisted of thirteen questions exemplifying communication behaviors emitted by supervisors on the job, and was based on the theoretical areas discussed by Redding. Data

were collected via personal interviews and modified Likert-type scales were used regarding each question: (always or almost always: 95-100%; very frequently: 70-95%; often: 30-70%; seldom: 5-30%; never or almost never: 0-5%).

The study was conducted in a large industrial organization in Akron, Ohio and dealt with the entire populations across four autonomous yet interrelated departments in the organization: Time Study, Customer Service, Scheduling, and Quality Control. The total sample consisted of 145 employees. No departmental supervisors participated as respondents as the thrust of the research dealt with subordinate perceptions only. All respondents consisted of salaried personnel with a minimum of twelve years formal education. Over 90% of all respondents had a minimum of one year college education, and the average income was approximately $10,000 annually. The personnel performed various interrelated clerical functions and operated at a similar level in the organization. Data were collected by questionnaires and personal interviews.

Results

Using the three dimensions of perceived supervisor credibility as criterion variables and thirteen supervisor communication behaviors as predictor variables, three separate step-wise regression analyses were performed. Nine of the thirteen communication behaviors correlated significantly with one or more of the credibility dimensions at the .01 level. Tables 2-4 indicate the results of the regression analyses. Below are the nine predictor variables:

1. Approximately how often does your immediate supervisor delegate responsibilities in decision-making to you?

2. Approximately how often are you asked for your opinion concerning up-coming decisions?
3. About how often do you have the opportunity to give additional ideas or information to your immediate supervisor ever and above what he's asked for?
4. In general, how often do you get prompt answers to questions and suggestions sent to your immediate supervisor?
5. Approximately, how often do you find it easy to get help from your immediate supervisor concerning your problems and complaints?
6. From your experience, how often is your immediate supervisor aware of and responsive to your feelings and needs?
7. In general, how often does frankness and openness exist between you and your immediate supervisor?
8. How often do you feel that your immediate supervisor would support you if you brought a legitimate grievance to upper management?
9. How often do you feel that your immediate supervisor has a sincere interest in your welfare?

With reference to Predictor Variable 9, it was considered necessary to determine more specific communication behaviors which might exemplify sincere concern for the welfare of subordinates. As indicated earlier, the questions representing the predictor variable were asked during personal interviews with

all 145 subjects. During each interview the question and response which represented Predictor Variable 9 was repeated to the respondent. The following question was then asked by the interviewer: "Now my question is--how is this feeling you have toward your supervisor communicated to you? In other words, what does your supervisor do on the job that would give you the impression that he feels this way about you?" The subjects' verbatim responses were recorded on the interview guide. This verbatim data were content analyzed and then submitted to two separate coders. Intercoder reliability was .87, and it was decided that six distinct categories of behavior emerged. Over half (52.4%) of the entire population of respondents suggested they feel their supervisor has sincere concern for their welfare because they exchange ideas with one another. It appears that as the reciprocal communication between supervisor and subordinates increases, so do the subordinates' perceptions that their supervisors are sincerely concerned about their welfare.

37.2% of the respondents said that the supervisors who show an interest in their personal lives were concerned about their welfare.

31.7% of the respondents said that their supervisors helped them when they needed assistance.

17.9% of the respondents said that their supervisors were concerned about them getting ahead.

16.6% of the respondents said that their supervisors support them on issues.

9.0% of the respondents said that their supervisors compliment them.

The following are examples of responses classified under the above categories:

> Exchange ideas. He frequently comes to me to get my opinion on things (105). He'll ask me if things are going O.K. (132). He comes around and asks how I feel about my work--if I'm happy. He wants to know about my feelings (136). He comes down--if he

has any pertinent questions, he talks to me about them (141). He talks to me about the job or whatever problems I have. He asks how things are going. He'll ask how things are going generally (067). He's interested in how things are going. He'll ask if I have any problems (082). He calls me in and we discuss complaints or problems (092). He calls me in and talks to me no matter what the problem is (122). He takes an interest in my ideas (067). He asks about my ideas. He asks how things are going. We hold "gripe" sessions. He's very receptive to hearing our ideas and suggestions (046). We always discuss aspects of my job. He keeps me informed of problems (100). He's always honest with me and willing to discuss things (102). We exchange ideas. We discuss our values and he seems concerned about how I think (006). We discuss jobs, ideas--anything. Our discussions cover broad areas; homelife; recreation, etc. (027). He and I are both old-timers. We both come to work an half-hour early. We have discussion periods then--discuss anything. We eat lunch together. We have a very good relationship (029). We've developed a real personal relationship. He always asks me how things are going. He always responds to my problems and concerns. He is like a father. He takes an interest in me. He respects my opinions. He questions them, but respects them. He's very frank and open (055). We continually discuss certain aspects of my job, and he listens to my viewpoint (064). He talks to me about my job. He takes my suggestions seriously (076). It's communication. There's nothing going on that I don't know of--he communicates things to me (086). He always keeps us up-to-date. He's always willing to talk (114). He's a good man to talk to--always accessable (093). He always takes the time to listen and talk (079).

Shows interest in my personal life. He lets me take time off for personal business in excess of company rules. He doesn't question me if I need time off. He takes me at my word. I can talk to him freely about personal problems and feelings (033). He asks me about my personal life as well as my feelings about the job. He seems concerned--not overly though. I always let him know when I have a problem (035). He is very personable. He makes a point to be interested in my personal life (041). We discuss my personal problems. He shows an interest in them (048). We've developed a real personal relationship. He always asks me how things are going. Concerned about my wife's health. He always responds to my questions and concerns. He's like a father--takes an interest in me (055). He tries to help me on personal problems such as family, vacations, time off, etc. (059). He wants to know about me and my family--our problems. He does this without appearing snoopy (061). I have a couple of older folks that I take care of at home. He makes concessions for me if I need time off (066). He's willing to

give me time off for personal affairs (073). He appears interested in my well-being and my being happy (074). I missed a total of six days because of the flu. He is very understanding and compassionate (075). We converse a lot about our families. He's willing to give me time off in case of emergencies. He's made special arrangements for me to take time off (145). I wanted to leave town to see my parents. He let me take a day off. One day I was sick on the job. He asked if I wanted to take off. He let me go home (123).

Helpful. He's interested in helping me to learn. He'll take the time to show me how to do things. He sincerely wants to help me. He expresses concern for me (013). If something difficult comes up on the job, or when conflicts occur between me and a salesman, I can go to my supervisor, and he can help me considerably by suggesting alternatives (053). He immediately reacts to our problems in a helpful manner (078). If I question him about something, he very quickly responds. If I have aproblem, I can go to him, and he'll lead me in the right direction--whether personal or job related (090). He always asks if there is anything he can do for me. He checks with me every couple days to see how things are going (105). If I have any questions, he's very helpful. He explains things to me. He's fully informative (119). He's very interested in all aspects of my job. He's willing to work with me and help me where he can (126). If I have any problems, he'll help me it he can (135). When he comes in in the morning, he'll ask what's going on in the job. If we run into trouble, we call him. He comes immediately to help. It's dirty out there (142). He always answers my questions. He tries to solve problems for us if we need help (005). If we are doing something wrong or right, he'll tell us and why (008). He'll point out things that help me do a good job (019). Anytime something goes wrong, he wants to make sure correct action is taken to correct it. He conveys that to you to make sure you know he is interested (062).

Concerned about my getting ahead. If it were in his hands he would give us more money (103). I've been talking to him about getting off this job and going to something better. I know he's working on it (140). We talk a lot--he likes me. I think if he can help me he would. He's told me that anytime I want to interview for a better job, he'll help me (134). He is willing to look at me in a way that he compares me with the way I was when I began and the way I am now. He's concerned about my progress. He wants me to get ahead (049). He's very concerned about our progress and where we are going. (050). We've talked about my future and the necessity for my continuing my education (058). Recently he has put through a letter suggesting I be given an increase in salary (077). He's willing to give me periodic pay raises

frequently (087). When openings come available, he's told me about them. He would try to help place me in another job if my job would be discontinued (112). He tried and succeeded to up-grade my job description (124). Job openings will occur in other departments. He determines whether the jobs will be good or bad for individuals. He's sincerely concerned about him men getting ahead (002).

Supports me. He's not afraid to go to his immediate boss and talk about my job or work (076). If something comes up and its not my fault, he'll stick up for me (083). He backs us up when we make decisions (089). He always backs me on my problems (104). He treats me well, I was layed off--my supervisor wanted me back--and I came back (120). He's stood up for me in the past. He fought for two merit raises for me--that management didn't want to give (124). He'll stand behind us on our decisions--until proven wrong (143). He has taken grievances of mine to the department manager. I know he'll back me up (010). When we're in a tight spot with the union or other departments, he'll back us up if we're right. He doesn't want us to be dealt dirty by anybody (016). He makes me look good in front of his bosses. He wouldn't talk behind my back. If I make a wrong decision, he would tell me rather than someone else who could hold it against me (023). If he can't help me, he'll show me where to get satisfaction. He's very supportive when going above to get something done. He uses the term "we" (043). Anytime I've suggested anything or asked anything, he, as a rule, has gone along with them (121).

Compliments me. He will commend you on a good job (073). He commends me on my work. He takes high interest in individual achievements (080). He's complimentary. He tells me when I do a good job (102). He is complimentary towards me (115). He always lets me know I'm doing a satisfactory or above average job (128).

It is interesting to note that only 9% of the entire population of respondents felt that compliments were exemplary of a concern for their welfare, while 52.4% felt that the exchanging of ideas exemplified this concern.

Whereas the FORMER categories inherently suggest reciprocity, the LATTER inherently suggests a one-way linear, downward-directed communication.

Discussion

This study attempted to identify specific supervisor communication behaviors which relate to subordinate perceptions of supervisor credibility. The particular behaviors chosen were based on the theoretical areas stated by Redding. Obviously, many more specific supervisor communication behaviors

could be explored. The findings of this research, however, do begin to answer the question: If subordinates perceive their supervisors as credible sources, what communication behaviors relate significantly to waht credibility dimensions? The findings suggest that dimensions of supervisor credibility are functions of the following behaviors:

1. Delegating responsibility in decision-making to subordinates (Safety).
2. Asking subordinates' opinions concerning up-coming decisions (Safety and Dynamism).
3. Giving subordinates opportunities to give additional ideas or information over and above what the supervisor has asked for (Safety, Qualification, and Dynamism).
4. Giving prompt answers to questions and suggestions (Safety, Qualification, and Dynamism).
5. Making sure that subordinates find it easy to get help with their problems and complaints (Safety and Qualification).
6. Being aware of and responsive to subordinates' feelings and needs (Safety).
7. Being "frank" and "open" with subordinates (Dynamism).
8. Being supportive of subordinates concerning the complaints to upper management (Safety and Qualification).
9. Expressing a sincere concern for the welfare of subordinates (Safety, Qualification, and Dynamism) by:
    1. maintaining reciprocal relationships by exchanging ideas with subordinates;
    2. showing interest in the personal lives of subordinates;

3. being helpful when help is needed;
4. being concerned about subordinates getting ahead in the organization;
5. being supportive with upper management;
6. and by complimenting subordinates.

There isn't much doubt concerning the importance of perceived source credibility in human interaction. It appears that fruitful research could be done developing instruments to measure the variable according to specific source-types. More importantly, perceived credibility should be treated as a dependent variable to determine what communication behaviors correlate with what credibility dimensions unique to specific source-types within particular environmental contexts.

Table 1

Rotated Factor Matrix for Subordinate Perceptions of Immediate Supervisors

Scales	I	II	III	IV	h^2
safe-dangerous	.06	.43	.47	.19	.44
just-unjust	.15	.15	.83	.08	.74
calm-upset	.02.	.13	.16	.86	.79
objective-subjective	.25	.22	.53	.20	.44
unjustified-selfish	-.11	.30	.51	.15	.39
patient-impatient	-.11	.18	.42	.65	.64
fair-unfair	.17	.33	.74	.07	.69
ethical-unethical	.07	.37	.72	.24	.71
trained-untrained	.14	.67.	.46	.07	.69
experienced-inexperienced	.32	.63	.22	-.07	.55
authoritative-unauthoritative	.54	.26	.15	-.03	.38
skilled-unskilled	.29	.81	.13	.09	.77
informed-uninformed	.37	.57	.29	.29	.63
intelligent-unintelligent	.26	.57	.39	.21	.60
qualified-unqualified	.25	.74	.36	.16	.76
able-inept	.30	.67	.43	.17	.75
frank-reserved	.50	.11	.40	-.04	.42
fast-slow	.68	.30	.10	-.01	.56
energetic-tired	.65	.18	-.34	-.00	.58
bold-timid	.75	.06	-.06	.04	.57
active-passive	.71	.12	.29	-.04	.61
aggressive-meek	.84	.15	.10	-.01	.74
emphatic-hesitant	.74	.29	.05	.18	.66
forceful-forceless	.83	.18	.07	.01	.73
Total Variance	42.3	14.1	5.8	5.2	67.5
Common Variance	66.0	20.4	7.0	6.5	100.0

Table 2

Stepwise Regression Analysis of the Relationship Between Safety and Behavioral Components.

Safety					
Predictor	R	R^2	Inc.	F	P
8	.53	.28		55.90	.01
6	.62	.38	.10	23.32	.01
9	.65	.42	.04	9.01	.01
5	.66	.44	.02	4.79	.01
1	.68	.46	.02	4.74	.01
3	.69	.48	.02	4.64	.01
4	.70	.49	.01	3.63	.01
2	.70	.49	.01	2.17	.05

Table 3

Stepwise Regression Analysis of the Relationship Between Qualification and Behavioral Components.

Qualification					
Predictor	R	R^2	Inc.	F	P
9	.51	.26		51.35	.01
4	.60	.36	.10	22.08	.01
8	.62	.39	.02	5.49	.01
3	.64	.41	.02	4.44	.01
5	.65	.42	.01	3.50	.01

Table 4

Stepwise Regression Analysis of the Relationship Between Dynamism and Behavioral Components.

Dynamism					
Predictor	R	R^2	Inc.	F	P
4	.38	.15		24.65	.01
7	.47	.22	.08	13.70	.01
9	.50	.25	.02	4.50	.01
2	.51	.26	.02	3.18	.01
3	.53	.28	.02	3.89	.01

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